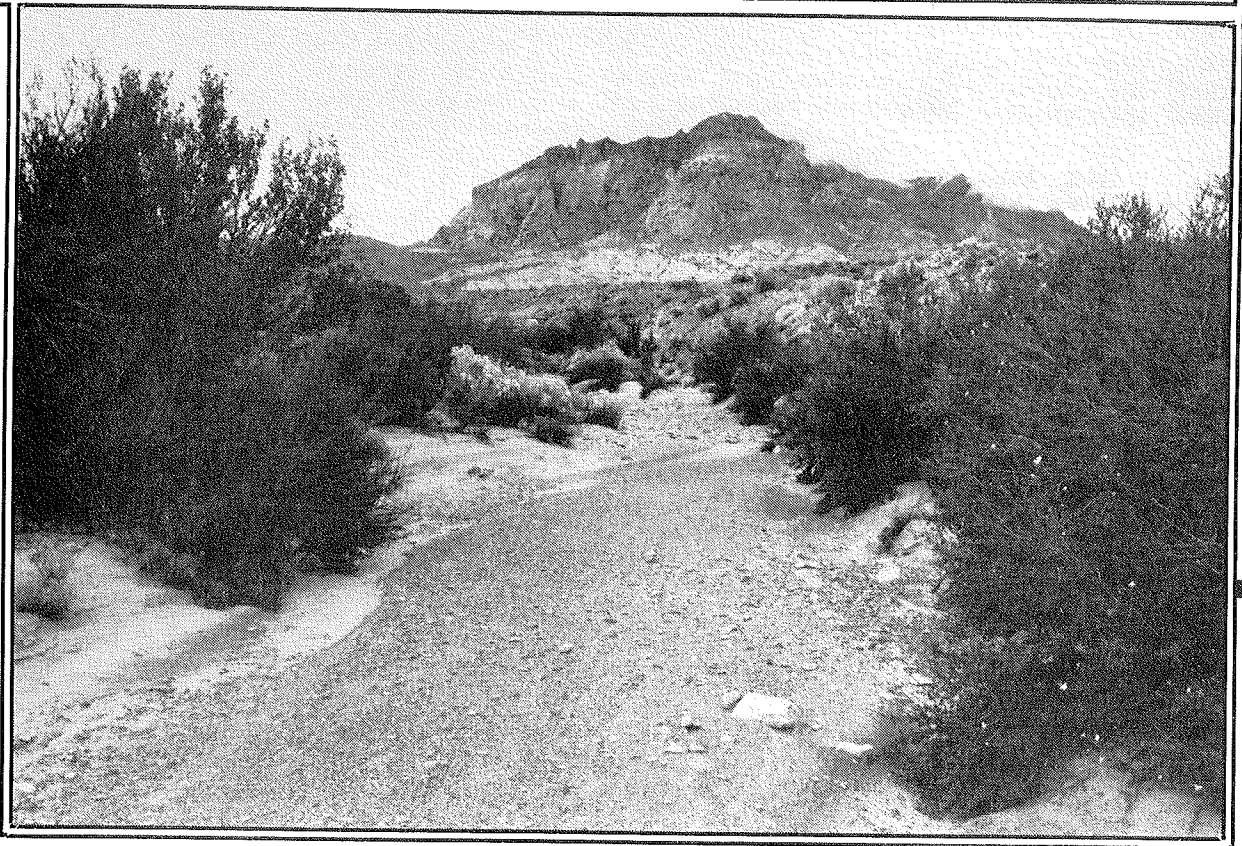


# Little Rockies WSA



# LITTLE ROCKIES WSA

## Little Rockies WSA Proposal UT-050-247



RECOMMENDED FOR  
WILDERNESS



RECOMMENDED FOR  
NON-WILDERNESS



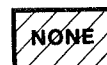
LAND OUTSIDE WSA  
RECOMMENDED FOR  
WILDERNESS



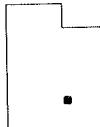
SPLIT ESTATE LAND  
WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY



STATE LAND WITHIN  
WSA BOUNDARY



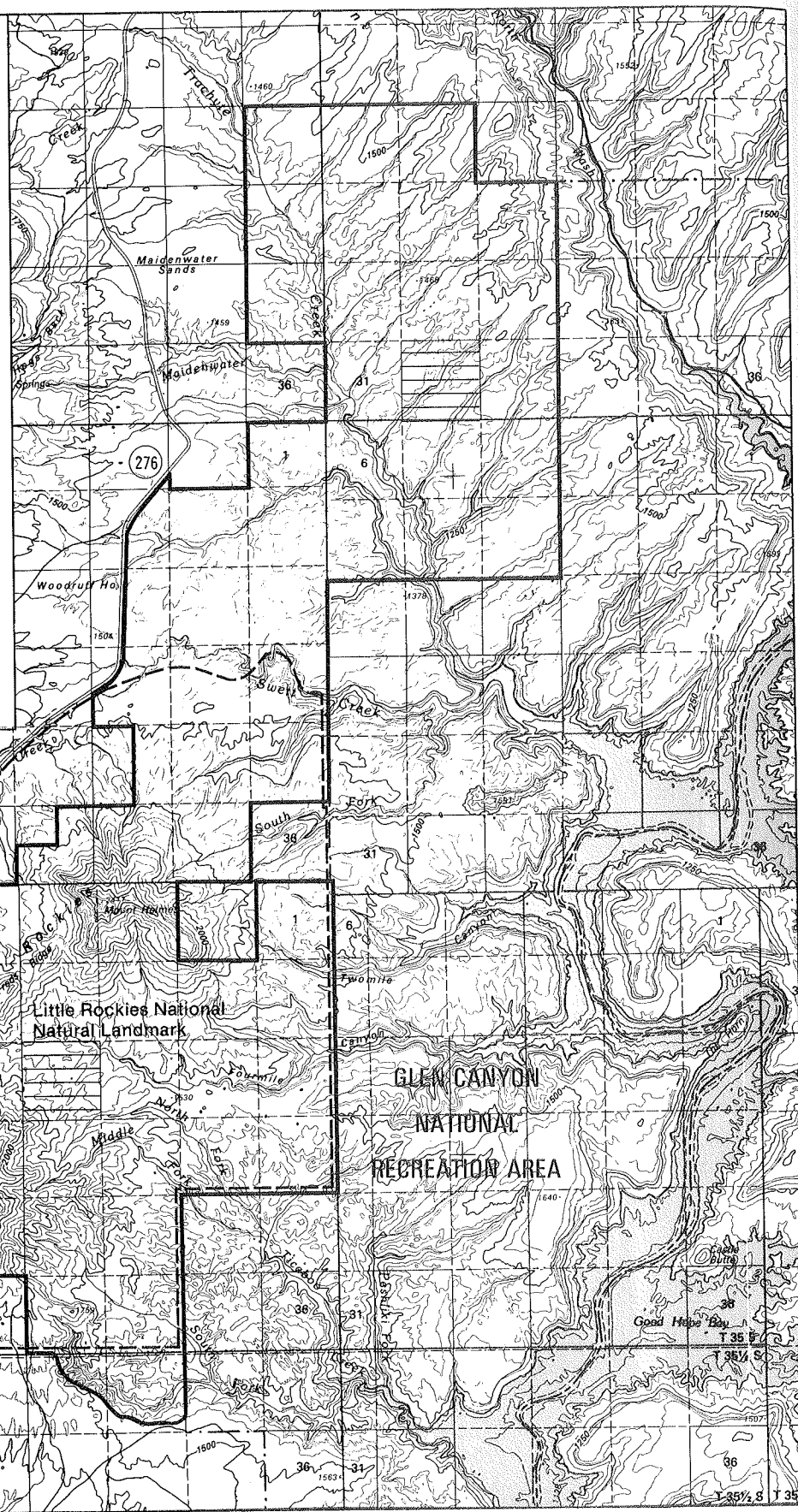
PRIVATE LAND WITHIN  
WSA BOUNDARY



SCALE IN MILES  
0 1 2

SCALE IN KILOMETERS  
0 1 2 3

ELEVATION EXPRESSED IN METERS



T. 33 S.

T. 34 S.

T. 35 S.

R. 11 E.

R. 12 E.

R. 13 E.

October 1991

# **LITTLE ROCKIES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA**

## **1. THE STUDY AREA: 38,700 acres**

The Little Rockies Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-050-247) is in the Henry Mountains in eastern Garfield County, about 75 miles south of Hanksville, Utah. The WSA is elongated, and measures about 17 miles from north to south and 4 miles from east to west. The Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (GCNRA) borders the eastern side of the WSA and State Highway 276 borders the western side (see Map). The WSA contains 38,700 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Two sections (1,280 acres) of State land are inheld within the WSA, but there are no other non-Federal lands (see Table 1). The Little Rockies were designated as a National Natural Landmark (NNL) in 1975 in recognition of the geologic values in the area.

The WSA includes two mountain peaks, Mt. Ellsworth and Mt. Holmes, which, like other peaks in the Henry Mountains, are bodies of igneous rocks that intruded and deformed overlying sedimentary layers.

**TABLE 1  
LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA<sup>a</sup>**

<b>WITHIN THE WSA</b>	<b>ACRES</b>
BLM (surface and subsurface)	38,700
Split-Estate (BLM surface only)	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	1,280
Total	39,980
<b>WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY</b>	
BLM (within the WSA)	38,700
BLM (outside the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (within the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (outside the WSA)	0
Total BLM land recommended for wilderness	38,700
In-holdings (State, private)	1,280
<b>WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS</b>	
BLM	0
Split-Estate	0
Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	0

Source: BLM File Data

<sup>a</sup> The Appendix is a detailed table of in-holdings included within the portion of the WSA recommended for designation.

## LITTLE ROCKIES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

The WSA is dominated by Mt. Ellsworth and Mt. Holmes, but in the northern and eastern portions it also includes high, narrow mesas cut by deep canyons. Elevations range from 4,000 feet to 8,235 feet at the crest of Mt. Ellsworth. Almost half of the WSA is bare rock outcrop; blackbrush and other shrubs are the dominant vegetative type in the remainder of the area.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) finalized in November 1990. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: an all wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation in this report; and a no wilderness (no action) alternative.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

38,700 acres

(recommended for wilderness)

0 acres

(not recommended for wilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate the entire area as wilderness. This is the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation will apply to any in-holdings acquired through purchase or exchange with willing owners. The Appendix lists all in-holdings and split-estate tracts and provides additional information on acquisition of in-holdings and split-estate minerals.

All of the area recommended is natural and about 72 percent has outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. Uranium deposits may exist in the WSA, but their development is unlikely. Gold and silver may occur in the southern part of the WSA, but the high wilderness values outweigh their significance.

Wilderness designation would be consistent with the 1975 designation of the area as a NNL, and would complement management in the adjacent GCNRA.

### 3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

#### Wilderness Characteristics

##### A. Naturalness

Naturalness is defined as an attribute in which the evidence of man is substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor and where minor imprints of man exhibit no cumulative impact that is substantially noticeable. Most of this WSA is in a completely natural condition. This WSA consists of high narrow plateaus and mesas separated by deep slickrock canyons and the Little Rockies (Mt. Holmes and Mt. Ellsworth). These peaks were designated a NNL in 1975 for their outstanding geologic features. Trachyte Creek, a perennial stream, is located in the northern part of the study area, and numerous ephemeral streams in beautiful canyons either drain into Trachyte Creek or directly into Lake Powell. The study area contains an overwhelming array of slickrock and canyons. No human intrusions in the study area require rehabilitation. Since establishment of the WSA approximately one-third of an acre has been disturbed due to uranium exploration and drilling. This area has been reclaimed to a substantially unnoticeable condition.

The only human intrusion is a National Park Service (NPS) transmitter site atop Mt. Ellsworth. The transmitter site occupies less than 1 acre and is maintained by helicopter.

##### B. Solitude

Overall, the quality of opportunities for solitude meet the standards set by the Wilderness Act on 27,700 acres. Approximately 11,000 acres do not have outstanding opportunities for solitude. The excellent vistas of Lake Powell and central Utah from the summits of Mt. Holmes and Mt. Ellsworth give visitors a sense of solitude. Numerous steep-walled, narrow canyons such as Four Mile, Two Mile, Maidenwater, and Trachyte provide topographic screening.

## LITTLE ROCKIES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Vegetation is sparse pinyon-juniper woodland and is not a factor in determining the degree of solitude. No sights and sounds outside the WSA interfere with a visitor's opportunity to feel secluded.

### C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

Overall, opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation meet the standards set by the Wilderness Act on 27,700 acres. The remaining 11,000 acres do not meet the standards.

The WSA has a diversity of recreational opportunities, including excellent opportunities for sightseeing, hiking, backpacking, camping, geologic study, and photography. Several interesting loop hiking routes are possible through challenging and varied terrain including both mountain peaks and canyons.

The NPS proposal for wilderness in the adjacent portion of GCNRA enhances the outstanding primitive recreation opportunities in the WSA. For example, hiking routes continue down the drainages to Lake Powell.

### D. Special Features

The area has historical values in that several archaeological sites have been identified, and there is a high potential for the discovery of additional sites.

Portions of this WSA were designated as a NNL in 1975 because of the geologic values represented.

Approximately 98 percent of the WSA is rated as outstanding for scenic quality.

Because of the remote and isolated nature of portions of this WSA, there is high quality potential habitat for desert bighorn sheep. In January 1985, 21 desert bighorn sheep were introduced into the WSA by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR). This has increased the ecological values of the WSA. Bald eagles and peregrine falcons, listed as endangered species, and three special status animal species may occur in the WSA.

One plant species which is listed as endangered (*Sclerocactus wrightiae*) may occur in the WSA. In addition, two other special status plant species may also occur in the WSA.

Refer to Appendix 4 and the Affected Environment, Vegetation and Wildlife Including Special Status Species sections of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS for additional information.

### Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

#### A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would add a combination of potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystems not presently represented in the NWPS.

PNV is the vegetative type that would eventually become climax vegetation if not altered by human interference, and is not necessarily the vegetation that is currently present in an area.

The WSA is in the Colorado Plateau Province/Ecoregion. The PNV in the WSA is blackbrush (15,480 acres) and juniper-pinyon woodland (23,220 acres). Blackbrush PNV is not represented in the NWPS either nationally or in Utah and is represented in other BLM study areas only in Utah.

This information is summarized in Table 2 from data compiled in December 1989.

#### B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation within a Days Driving Time (5 Hours) of Major Population Centers

The WSA is within a 5-hour drive of the Provo-Orem, Utah statistical metropolitan area. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated wilderness and other BLM study areas within a 5-hour drive of this population center.

#### C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Little Rockies WSA would not contribute significantly to balancing the

# LITTLE ROCKIES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

TABLE 2  
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION

BAILEY-KUCHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV)	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
NATIONWIDE (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Blackbrush	0	0	11	214,584
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	10	1,401,745	84	2,120,745
UTAH (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Blackbrush	0	0	11	214,584
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	1	26,000	53	1,682,978

Source: BLM File Data.

TABLE 3  
WILDERNESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS OF MAJOR POPULATION CENTERS

POPULATION CENTERS	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
Provo-Orem, Utah	11	721,793	90	2,748,168

Source: BLM File Data.

geographic distribution of wilderness areas within the NWPS.

As of January 1987, the NWPS included 93 areas comprising 5,475,207 acres in Utah, Arizona, and Colorado.

A Little Rockies Wilderness would supplement the NWPS in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau, however, where there are just two established wilderness areas, totaling 70,751 acres. There are three designated wilderness areas within 100 miles of the WSA. To the southeast is the 45,000-acre Dark Canyon Wilderness, and to the west-southwest is the Box-Death Hollow 25,751-acre Wilderness. Both are administered by the U.S. Forest Service (FS). Also to the southwest is the 112,400-acre Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness administered by BLM.

Manageability (The area must be capable of being effectively managed to preserve its wilderness character.)

The entire WSA can be effectively managed to preserve the wilderness values now in the area. Current uses and activities such as livestock grazing would continue but would not affect the wilderness values of the area. There are no private lands, rights-of-way or other valid rights in the WSA that would conflict with wilderness management.

There are no mineral leases in the WSA, and new leases would not be issued. There are presently 31 mining claims in the WSA covering 620 acres. Because there is some potential for uranium, silver and other locatable minerals in the WSA it is projected that a portion of these and future mining claims existing at the time of wilderness designation will be explored and possibly developed following designation. Disturbance from these activities would likely be small (less than 10 acres) and would not affect the overall manageability of the wilderness.

## LITTLE ROCKIES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

The presence of two State sections (1,280 acres) in the study area could create manageability problems because BLM would be required to provide reasonable access to State lands and would have no control over activities on State lands. Because there is some potential for locatable minerals in the WSA, it is projected that in the foreseeable future there would be at least some exploration on State lands that could reduce wilderness values in small parts of the recommended wilderness. The over all effect on wilderness management would be small.

### Energy and Mineral Resource Values

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) prepared a mineral assessment report for the Little Rockies WSA (USGS Bulletin 1751-A, Russell F. Dubiel, et al., 1987). The report indicates that the WSA has low mineral resource potential for oil and gas, nonmetals, and geothermal energy. A small part of the southeastern portion of the WSA contains an identified sub-economic resource of uranium, and the southern part of the WSA generally has high potential for undiscovered occurrences of uranium except for igneous outcrops on Mt. Holmes and Mt. Ellsworth, which have low potential. The northern part of the study area has moderate potential for uranium. All of the WSA has a low mineral resource potential for copper, lead, silver, and gold.

### Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 4) summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the area as wilderness.

### Local Social and Economic Considerations

Over the foreseeable future, wilderness designation would not significantly affect local economic conditions. Benefits to the local economy from 10 mineral-related jobs would be eliminated by wilderness designation but this would not be significant on a regional basis.

### Summary of WSA-Specific Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments received during the early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of the WSA.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, a total of 44 inputs specifically addressing this WSA were received from 351 commenters, including oral statements received at 17 public hearings on the EIS. Each letter or oral testimony was considered to be one input. Duplicate letters or oral statements by the same commenter were not counted as additional inputs or signatures. Each individual was credited with one signature or testimony regardless of the number of inputs. In general, 33 commenters supported wilderness designation for part or all of the WSA, while 314 commenters were opposed. Four commenters addressed the relative merits of the EIS but took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the wilderness values and special features in the WSA. The majority of those commenting in favor of wilderness were from other states and urban Utah.

Those opposing wilderness were concerned that wilderness would prohibit or restrict mineral exploration and development, public access, livestock management, and flood and erosion control; harm local and State economies; and that wilderness designation is unnecessary to protect the area and that it would conflict with other uses. Most of those opposing wilderness designation were from rural Utah.

Two Federal agencies, the USBM and NPS commented on the Draft EIS. The USBM did not take a position regarding wilderness designation but reported a small copper deposit in the WSA. The NPS concurred with the proposed action. The NPS believes that wilderness designation will afford greater protection to the Little Rockies NNL.

## LITTLE ROCKIES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

There are two State in-holdings (1,280 acres) in the WSA. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the State of Utah expressed general opposition to wilderness designation but did not take a definite position regarding wilderness designation of the WSA. The State noted that the geology section should be expanded to include the type and age ranges of surface rocks and to provide additional information on the Salt Wash Member of the Morrison Formation in the WSA. According to the State, additional information is needed to characterize the uranium potential of the study area. The State also recommended that the WSA boundary be moved back from Highway 267 to allow for maintenance of the highway.

The State believes that the Little Rockies WSA has high wilderness values and low to moderate conflicts when compared with other WSAs in the region. The Little Rockies WSA is in Garfield County. The Garfield County Master Plan covers this WSA. In the plan, Garfield County proposed that 142,653 acres in three BLM and one FS area be recommended to the Utah Congressional delegation as wilderness. The county plan recommends that the remaining lands within the county, including the Little Rockies WSA, be retained for multiple uses.

The County Commission has endorsed the Consolidated Local Government Response to Wilderness that opposes wilderness designation of BLM lands in Utah. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the Commission stated that restrictions on motorized access would have a detrimental effect on hunting, and that numerous sections of State land would be restricted from providing revenues for the State school system.

# LITTLE ROCKIES WSA

Table 4  
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

Alternatives		No Action/No Wilderness	
Recommendation All Wilderness (38,700 Acres)			
Issue Topic			
Impacts on Wilderness Values	Wilderness designation would preserve wilderness values overall in the WSA. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 3 acres because of uranium exploration and development and would be indirectly reduced in quality on up to an additional 774 acres. Special features would be preserved overall. Some Class A scenery would be reduced in quality in the disturbed areas. The flow of water through Trachyte Creek would be maintained. This alternative would complement the NPS proposal for wilderness designation in the contiguous portion of the Glen Canyon NRA.	Wilderness values would not be protected by wilderness designation and loss would occur as intrusions increase. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on less than 1 percent (3 acres) of the WSA because of uranium exploration and development and would be indirectly reduced in quality on up to an additional 1,935 acres of the WSA. Most special features would not be significantly affected. Class A scenery would be reduced in quality in the disturbed areas and Trachyte Creek could be dewatered. This alternative would not complement the NPS proposal for wilderness management in the contiguous portion of the Glen Canyon NRA. Water could be diverted from the Trachyte Creek upstream of the WSA and used for mining and irrigation.	
Impacts on Water Resources	Development and use of water from Trachyte Creek for irrigation and mining could be hampered or restricted because changes in use, changes in points of diversion, or transfer of water rights could be protected by the Federal government to maintain flow through the wilderness.	The 6 miles of Trachyte Creek in the WSA could be dewatered and water quality reduced during periods of flow.	
Impacts on Mineral and Energy Exploration and Production	With this alternative, there would not be a significant loss of potential for oil and gas recovery. There is a potential for a loss of commercial deposits of locatable minerals. However, much of the uranium and associated mineral resource is currently under claim and, if valid, could be developed. Therefore, potential to produce an unknown but likely insignificant quantity of locatable mineral resources would be foregone.	Implementation of this alternative would not adversely affect mineral and energy resource exploration and production beyond existing restrictions in the Little Rockies WSA.	
Impacts on Economic Conditions	Over the foreseeable future, wilderness designation would not significantly affect local economic conditions. Benefits to the local economy from 10 mineral-related jobs would be eliminated by wilderness designation.	Present economic conditions would not be significantly affected. Over the foreseeable future, mineral activity would increase local employment by 15 jobs which is about 1 percent in Garfield County and about 1.8 percent in Wayne County.	

# LITTLE ROCKIES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Appendix  
Estimated Costs of Acquisition of Non-Federal Holdings Within Areas Recommended for Designation <sup>a</sup>

Legal Description (Prior to any Subdivision)	Total Acreage	Number of Owners (If Parcel has been subdivided)	Type of Ownership by Estate (Federal, State, Private, Other) (Surface Estate) (Subsurface Estate)	Presently Proposed for Acquisition (Yes, No)	Preferred Method of Acquisition (Purchase, Exchange, Other)	Estimated Cost of Acquisition (Land Costs)	Estimated Cost of Acquisition (Processing Costs)
T. 33 S., R. 13 E., Sec. 32	640.00		State	No	Exchange		\$2,000
T. 33 S., R. 12 E., Sec. 16	640.00		State	No	Exchange		\$2,000

<sup>a</sup> The estimated costs listed in this appendix in no way represent a Federal appraised value of the land or mineral estate, but are rough estimates based on sales or exchanges of lands or mineral estates with similar characteristics to those included in the WSA. The estimates are for purposes of establishing a range of potential costs to the government of acquiring non-Federal holdings and in no way represent an offer to purchase or exchange at the cost estimate included in this appendix.